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ABSTRACT

This report describes a campus-based, student-centered model for practicums for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). It incorporates teaching and non-teaching activities and develops the self-knowledge and skills associated with effective classroom practice. The distinguishing feature of the program is the combination of activities included and the intensity and degree of integration achieved in the experience. Each session consists of phases in student orientation, student observation, mentored teaching, and personal portfolio development; the mentored teaching is the most intense. The practicum model presented provides pre-service students with an integrated, developmental experience that takes them from novice to professional in abilities; it connects knowledge about teaching with the act of teaching and lays the foundation for continued personal and professional development. The model contributes as much to the individual as it does to the profession as a whole. (Contains 10 references.) (NAV)

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The practicum in TESOL: An integrated model

ED 389 172

Over the past several decades the practicum has emerged as a regular feature of TESOL teacher preparation programs. A recent survey of programs listed in *The Directory of Professional Preparation Programs in TESOL in the United States* (Richards & Crookes,1988) revealed that 75% of the programs responding to the survey included a practicum course. Richards and Crookes found a wide range of activities occurred under the rubric of the practicum including: a) observing experienced teachers, b) observing peers live or on video tape, c) being observed by supervising or mentor teachers, d) conferencing with supervising or mentor teachers, e) attending practicum seminars, f) participating in peer teaching sessions, and g) delivering classroom instruction. These activities can be grouped into teaching and non-teaching experiences and both types of activity are thought to contribute to the development of effective classroom teachers. The practicum forms the nexus between what we know about teaching and the act of teaching; it is the place where students acquire the self-knowledge that leads to personal growth and professional competence.

Yet despite its acknowledged importance and prevalence in TESOL teacher education programs, few descriptions of specific practicum models exist. What follows is one approach to delivering a campus-based practicum in TESOL teacher preparation. The model (refer to Figure 1) systematically incorporates many teaching and non-teaching activities that commonly occur in the TESOL practicum, while seeking to develop the self-knowledge and skills associated with effective classroom practice. What distinguishes this particular model is the combination of activities included and the intensity and degree of integration achieved in the experience. The model has five principal features:

*Integrates the practicum into the academic program.

The student's academic program is four terms in duration. Students begin preparing for and participating in the practicum experience from their first term in the TESOL program.

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*Emphasizes a team approach to delivering the practicum.

The team consists of mentor teachers (who serve as mentors and coaches), graduate program faculty (who serve as supervising teachers, academic advisors and course instructors), language institute administrators (who serve as language program manager and curriculum coordinator), and the student teachers (who serve as classroom assistants, observers, and teachers). Each team member participates in each phase of the four-term experience, and shares in a collegial, consultative decision making process.

*Provides intensive mentoring and coaching.

Mentor teachers spend an average of 10 hours per week working one-on-one with each student (assisting them in lesson planning, providing feedback on lesson plans, and offering practical teaching tips). Supervising faculty meet twice each term with student teachers to discuss any student concerns and to offer support.

*Incorporates extensive, systematic observation

Students are observed regularly by their mentor teachers; they are observed by a supervising faculty member, and they are required to observe their peers at specific points in the practicum cycle.

*Assesses the experience by means of a portfolio

Students develop a portfolio that is presented to and accepted by the student's graduate advisor before credit is conferred for the practicum experience.

Orientation Phase

Students enrolled in the practicum experience received four-term assistantships and were assigned to the language program administrator's staff. The Orientation Phase began with a group meeting in which students were apprised of their team roles and responsibilities. During their first term, students attended weekly staff meetings; served as program aides assisting with classroom field trips, community-based activities, and small group work; and students conducted general observations. This phase

gave students an introduction to the organization and operation of the language program and provided an opportunity to interact with program staff and the ESL students. Students' total obligations to the practicum during this period averaged seven hours a week.

Student Observation Phase

Initially, the Student Observation Phase began near the end of the first term and continued through the second term of the student's academic program. During the general observation period, the student was encouraged to "explore" the ESL classroom as opposed to evaluate it (Fanselow, 1988). This period allowed students to immerse themselves in the classroom community and to experience it much as a visitor might experience a new culture. While students were encouraged to take field notes on their experiences, it was not required. The only restriction placed on students during the general observation period was the requirement to follow a teacher through an entire instructional unit. Since the curriculum was theme-based and task oriented, a unit often lasted a week or more and mentor teachers, understandably, wanted students to see an entire instructional cycle--from its introduction through closure. While the general observation period provided an important introduction to the language classroom, it became clear that it had its limitations. Mentor teachers found the general observations, at times, to be overwhelming to both students and themselves. Students were not always sure where to focus their attention and mentor teachers lacked the time needed to respond to the volume of questions generated during student observations. Therefore, changes were made and general observations were limited to the first three weeks of the student's second term and were followed by seven weeks of focused observations. Richards and Lockhart (1994) have suggested that the potential benefits of observation are enhanced by having a clear idea of what one is trying to see. Delimiting what the student is looking for increases the likelihood the student will see it.

This led to the development of a handout that contained a series of "focused observation questions" (see appendix 1; Sayavedra, 1993). Students were instructed to select one or two questions to focus on during each observation and were encouraged to collect at least some data on each of the questions by the end of the focused observation period. This

observation procedure helped students identify some of the factors that contributed to effective language lessons and increased students' awareness of methods for solving classroom management problems. It also provided a starting point for discussions between the student and the mentor teacher. Mentor teachers used discussions as a way to get students to explore the effectiveness of a particular lesson and to provoke the student to reflect on what s/he would do in a similar situation.

A readiness staffing was conducted at the end of the Student Observation Phase. The language program manager, curriculum coordinator, mentor teachers, and and graduate faculty met, as a team, and evaluated each student's readiness to assume classroom responsibilities. Discussions included candid appraisals of each student's demonstrated technical knowledge and skills as well as the student's personal attributes (e.g., maturity, confidence, enthusiasm). The team was usually unanimous in its appraisals and most students moved into the mentored teaching phase of the practicum by term three. However, occasionally the team would hold back a student, in which case selected team members met with the student and discussed the concerns raised in the readiness staffing. Then, together the student, the language program director, and the supervising faculty member developed a written plan for addressing the concerns.

Before assuming responsibility for their own classes, students were assigned to a mentor teacher and attended a three-hour workshop. The workshop included presentation and discussion of detailed exemplary lesson plans, helpful tips for new teachers, and a hands-on demonstration of audio-visual equipment. In addition, the mentor teachers provided students all the necessary materials for delivering the first week's instruction (including lesson plans, class handouts, and transparencies). This was possible because the language program had a well-defined curriculum and teachers had collected and developed many supplementary materials to support the theme-based, task-oriented focus of the curriculum.

Mentored Teaching Phase

The Mentored Teaching Phase, in addition to the five hours of teaching per week, required students to participate in three separate meetings each week. There was a general staff meeting where information was shared with all program staff and efforts were made to coordinate program activities. Participating in this meeting ensured students developed a general sense of how language programs operate and led to an increased sense of collegiality among students and regular program staff. Students also met as an instructional team with their mentor teacher once a week. Each mentor teacher was assigned between two and six students per term. The team meetings served as group planning sessions where students and their mentor planned the next week's instruction, shared ideas, and developed a rationale for what was to be taught in their classes. This meeting provided students with an extra margin of support that can often mark the difference between success and failure for novice teachers. The third meeting was also a coaching session in which the mentor teacher debriefed the weekly observation of the student and discussed any concerns related to the current week's lesson planning and teaching. This was a collaborative, animated give-and-take session that in many respects was the most important meeting of the week as reported by students. It gave students a chance to question their own assumptions as well as those of the mentor teacher; it was an opportunity to critically confront and reflect on their teaching.

In addition to weekly observations by the mentor teacher, students were observed twice by a supervising faculty member during the Mentored Teaching Phase. The first observation occurred between the third and sixth week of the student's teaching experience. The observation consisted of a clinical observation cycle (Acheson & Gall, 1980) where the supervising teacher carried out a three-step process with the student that included: 1) a pre-observation meeting in which the student established the context of the observation e.g., the lesson objective, background on the students, specific challenges faced by the teacher, etc., 2) the observation where the supervising teacher used a verbatim or selective verbatim technique to collect data on the lesson, and 3) a post-observation meeting where the student discussed his/her reactions to the data and reflected on

the lesson. The supervising faculty member's observations were less directive than those conducted by mentor teachers who often used the focused observation questions as a way of getting students to concentrate on one aspect of their teaching. The combination of supervisor and mentor observations struck a balance between non-directive/discovery-oriented supervision and more directive supervision. Gebhard (1984) encourages teacher educators to select from a range of supervisory behaviors and to employ those that contribute the most to the development of one's students. He cautions against the tendency to be overly directive in supervision, since it may actually retard the emergence of the student's personal talents and the assumption of responsibility for their own professional growth. The balance that emerged between supervision models appears to have contributed to students' development as teachers.

In addition to mentor and supervisor observations, students were required to participate in at least two peer coaching sessions during the Mentored Teaching Phase. These sessions had several purposes. First, they offered students the chance to assist their classmates in gaining additional insights into the observer's own teaching while offering the observer a chance to see how their peers approached the same teaching situation. Second, it was hoped that successful peer coaching experiences would lead students to adopt this practice as a permanent feature of their professional development, once they were in the field.

During this phase, students kept reflection journals where they recorded their reactions to teaching--insights they discovered, assumptions they had questioned, or alternatives they had considered. Students were encouraged to share and discuss their journal entries with their peers, mentor teachers, and supervising faculty. This aspect of the practicum became a rich source of self-directed learning for students.

The Mentored Teaching Phase of the practicum was clearly the most intense phase of the practicum experience. Students were enrolled for six hours of academic course work and three hours of internship credit. They taught five hours per week and had an average of four hours of additional meetings each week. On top of this, they had to prepare for their lessons. The experience was manageable, in large part, because there was significant support available to the students throughout this period. Support took the form of mentor teachers who were available to students

on a daily basis, peers who shared the experience, and supervising faculty who worked to link academic course content and activities to the classroom challenges faced by the students.

Portfolio Development

The notion of a portfolio has existed for years. The most common examples exist in the arts where designers and artists have often organized a representative sample of their work which is then presented to a potential employer, sponsor, or patron. Although the use of portfolios in the teaching profession is currently a topic of great interest, teachers have been using portfolios as a way of documenting student progress for many years. For example, reading and writing portfolios have been used by teachers to evaluate students' progress in elementary and secondary schools for a generation or more (Valencia & Calfee, 1991). What is new, though, is the interest in using portfolios to evaluate students' general academic achievement in educational programs (Black, 1993). The portfolio described here had two functions. First, it documented the student's growth and development permitting the student and faculty member to cooperatively assess the outcomes of the experience. Second, it assisted students in making the transition from graduate school to the TESOL profession. The portfolio was the culminating task for the four-term practicum experience, integrating activities that occurred throughout terms two, three, four, and, in some cases, term five. As such, it served as a record of the process students had experienced and as a final product they could use to promote themselves in the the world of work.

The portfolio contained five sections: 1) job search documents (e.g., cover letter, current resume, letters of recommendation from mentor teachers, language program administrators, and supervising faculty); 2) selected lesson plans; 3) instructional materials developed by the student; 4) a video segment of student teaching, and 5) a reflection journal completed during the mentored teaching phase. Additionally, students had the option of including evaluations of their teaching that had been completed by the supervising faculty member and/or ESL students.

The supervising faculty member met with students at the beginning of term three and shared examples of previous portfolios. Students

arranged to tape two 50-minute lessons over the following two terms. One session was reviewed by the student and supervising faculty member from the standpoint of getting students to consider their instructional actions and reflect on their decisions. Johnson (1992) reports on the value as well as the demands of this activity for student teachers. Schratz (1992) views audio-visual recordings as powerful instruments in the development of teachers' self-reflective competence. The first video session also allowed the student and the class to gain familiarity with the intrusion of video equipment into the language classroom. The second video session occurred during the fourth term of the practicum and was included in the portfolio as a means of demonstrating the student's teaching competence. Students were permitted to edit their portfolio video down to a 10-15 minute segment that showed a representative range of teacher actions (e.g., giving directions, conducting an activity, student reactions/responses to the teacher, teacher reactions/responses to students).

The supervising faculty member met individually with each student during the fourth and fifth terms and provided individual feedback on specific documents and work samples included in the student's portfolio. When the student and faculty member agreed the portfolio was in an acceptable form, it was approved and a final grade was turned in for the course.

The portfolio component of this model provided a comprehensive, accurate reflection of who our graduates were and what they were capable of doing in second language classrooms. Moreover, the portfolio increased students' self confidence and directly assisted them in their job searches. On average, 90 percent of the students who completed the program and participated in this practicum experience moved directly into teaching positions upon graduation. This was nearly twice the average rate of program graduates who did not participate in this form of the practicum. This performance-based alternative to traditional assessment in graduate education seems especially appropriate in the practicum where teacher educators ought to be promoting the growth of the individual while simultaneously promoting to the professionalization of TESOL.

In summary, this practicum model provides pre-service students in TESOL preparation programs with an integrated, developmental experience

that takes them from the novice stage to the point they are prepared to assume a professional position. It connects knowledge about teaching to the act of teaching and lays the foundation for continued personal and professional development. In short, it is a student-centered approach to teacher development that contributes as much to the individual as it does to the profession as a whole.

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PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

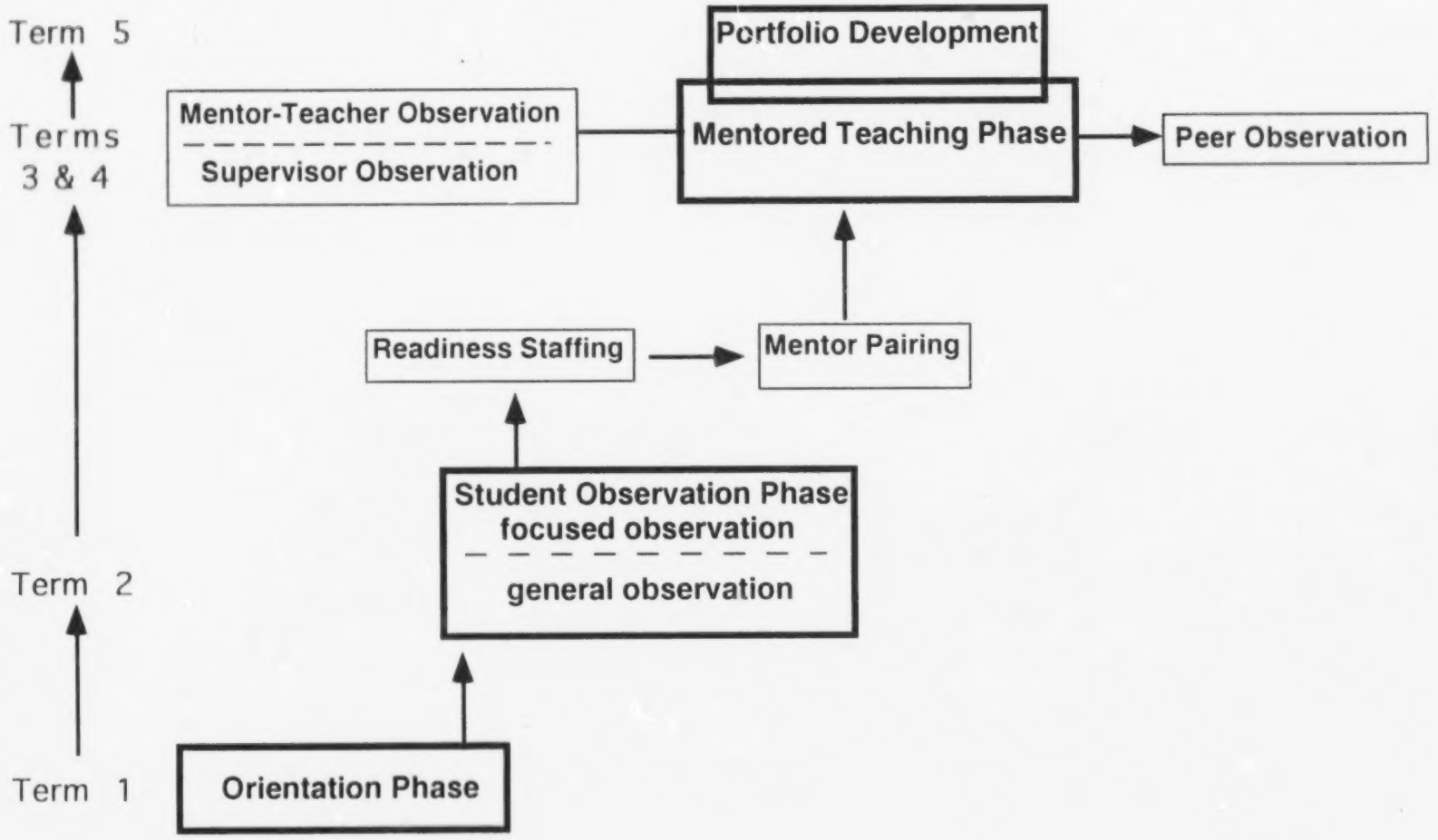

Figure 1

Handout 10

Focused Observation Questions

1. How does the teacher focus the students' attention on the lesson at the beginning of class?
2. How many activities take place during one class period? What type of activities are they? In what order are they introduced? How much time is spent on each? Why?
3. How does the teacher move the class from one activity to another?
4. How does the teacher provide closure to an activity?
5. What learning objectives has the teacher set? How does the teacher let students know the objectives or learning outcomes of the lesson, activity, or unit?
6. Does the teacher stay focused on the lesson?
7. How does the teacher introduce new material?
8. How does the teacher check whether students understand what they are supposed to do during an activity?
9. What kind of guided practice does the teacher provide for the students?
10. What kind of independent practice does the teacher provide for the students?
11. When and how does the teacher review material?
12. Does the teacher use realia in the classroom? If so, in what ways?
13. How does the teacher end class?
14. When and how does the teacher take care of administrative duties such as taking attendance or handing back homework?
15. Are students actively participating in the lesson? Do they seem interested? Bored? Happy? Afraid? What makes you think so?
16. How does the teacher get students to participate?
17. How does the teacher get quiet students to participate more actively?
18. How does the teacher get students to speak loudly enough?
19. How does the teacher deal with students who are not paying attention?
20. Does the teacher attempt to limit the first languages spoken in the classroom? How?
21. How does the teacher make the material meaningful and relevant to these particular students?
22. How does the teacher give directions for an activity? Verbally? Visually? Through examples?
23. How does the teacher emphasize main points? Is there a change in the volume of the teacher's voice or in the rate of speech or in body language?
24. When and how does the teacher correct students' errors?
25. When and how does the teacher give encouragement or praise?
26. At what points during the lesson does the teacher write on the board or overhead? Why?
27. How many times does the teacher repeat a question or phrase? Does the teacher repeat the question or phrase verbatim or does the teacher paraphrase?
28. Are there certain times when the teacher seems to use repetition and others when the teacher paraphrases? Why is this?
29. Where is the teacher standing while giving instructions to the whole class? While eliciting answers from individuals in the class? While students are engaged in small-group or paired activities?
30. How does the teacher assign homework?
31. Do you notice any differences in how teachers deal with these issues with different class levels?

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